

businesses, and industries around the world. Earthlink Network has developed a loyal following by harnessing the power of the Internet, and presenting it to consumers in an understandable and user-friendly format. For their dedication to quality and their innovations in the access provider industry, I ask my colleagues here today to join me in saluting the excellence of Earthlink Network, and in congratulating them on their 500,000th customer.

DRUG FREE BORDERS ACT

HON. RON PACKARD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 20, 1998

Mr. PACKARD. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to salute all of my colleagues who joined me last night in supporting the Drug Free Borders Act. I would especially like to commend Congressman PHILIP CRANE (R-IL) for his leadership in introducing this legislation and following through with its rapid progression.

The Drug Free Borders Act plays an important role in our renewed efforts to win the War on Drugs by authorizing an additional \$233 million for the U.S. Customs Service. This legislation also calls for 1,745 more Customs inspectors and special agents, as well as new drug-screening technologies to assist in existing interdiction efforts.

As a resident of the Southern California region bordering Mexico, I am well-aware of the issues that surround the importation of narcotics. As the Congressional Representative for the 48th District of California, I know that our efforts are best directed at strengthening the security at our ports of entry in order to curb this disturbing practice.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday's passage of the Drug Free Borders Act is one more sign of this Congress' commitment to winning the War on Drugs. I applaud my colleagues and urge them to persist with this battle.

CONGRESSIONAL TRAVEL

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 20, 1998

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, May 20, 1998 into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

REFORMING CONGRESSIONAL TRAVEL

One of the biggest changes I have seen during my years in Congress is an explosion in the number of complex issues Members of Congress are called upon to consider. Fortunately, Members have a host of resources on which they can rely for information, but these are no substitute for a Member's personal observations and experience. To get the broadest possible exposure to issues before Congress, Members must sometimes travel.

Congressional travel is frequently viewed with skepticism by the public, who worry that Members travel too often at too great an expense, with more emphasis on recreation than substance. They also voice concern about trips paid for by special-interest groups who are trying to influence the legis-

lative process. Congress has in recent years placed greater restrictions on travel, but occasional reports of abuses continue to raise the public's ire, with the unfortunate effect of discouraging some legitimate and useful congressional travel. Many Members do not travel at all because they fear the political consequences from being accused of taking a junket. I recently introduced a travel reform package which seeks to address some of the problems with congressional travel while enhancing its benefits to Congress and the public.

Reasons for travel: Domestic and foreign travel can greatly enhance a Member's knowledge, improving the quality of legislation and congressional oversight. In our system of government, Congress has the power of the purse. With this power to spend money comes the equally important responsibility to ensure that it is well-spent; and direct, personal oversight by Members of Congress is essential. Some congressional trips save taxpayer dollars by exposing wasteful programs both at home and abroad. Travel can improve a Member's understanding of the impact government policies have on a particular region or group of citizens and can also increase the public's knowledge of issues before Congress.

Foreign travel increases the expertise of Members on programs and issues that commit significant United States resources abroad, from programs to promote U.S. exports to overseas military deployments to food aid for developing nations. Travel also alerts Members to foreign trade opportunities which can directly benefit constituents in their home districts. Moreover, Members can advance our national interests: because they do not represent the President directly, sometimes they can say things that U.S. diplomats cannot. It is ironic that there are strong pressures against foreign congressional travel at the very time that America's security and economic interests are broader and more complex than ever.

Problems: The purpose of some congressional travel, however, is dubious. Particularly troublesome is travel paid for by groups who have a direct interest in legislation before Congress. Some groups, for example, will invite Members and staff to attend seminars or conferences at resorts or other appealing locations. Though these meetings are ostensibly to explore important issues, most are really aimed at advancing a specific point of view and gaining access for lobbyists to key Members and staff. These sorts of trips create at the very least the perception that Members of Congress are accepting nice trips in exchange for their votes. While I think this sort of gross exchange of votes for favors is rare, these trips do allow special interests to have greater access to Members of Congress, and with access often comes influence.

There are also questions about whether Members travel too lavishly and at too great an expense. Many congressional trips involve the use of military aircraft, which is sometimes justified. In addition, Members' spouses sometimes accompany them on trips, even though there may not be in all cases a legitimate reason for them to do so.

Reforms needed: Congress can do a better job of ensuring that travel serves legitimate purposes. Recent reforms have been helpful. In 1995, for example, the House enacted a gift ban which required Members and staff to disclose any travel paid for by private funds and emphasized that trips must relate to the official business of the House. But loopholes remain in the rules. In an effort to improve accountability in congressional travel, I recently introduced a travel reform resolution which would:

Improve reporting requirements: The House currently requires Members and staff to file

reports for certain types of travel. These reports often include the source of funds paying for travel, and an estimate of the cost of transportation, food, lodging, and other expenses. My proposal would require reports to also include a detailed itinerary and policy findings and recommendations; more information on private sources who fund trips; estimates of the costs of travel provided by a foreign government; and, if transportation is provided by the Department of Defense, an estimate of the cost equivalent commercial transportation.

Make travel records more accessible to the public: Currently, only reports for government-funded foreign travel are made widely available to the public. My proposal would require the House to publish in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD and on the Internet a compilation of all travel reports for each calendar quarter, as well as an annual summary of all House travel.

Ethics Committee approval for privately-funded trips: Under my proposal, travel funded by private sources would require advance authorization from the House Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee would have to examine whether the person or group paying for the trip has a direct interest in legislation before Congress, and whether acceptance of the trip would have an adverse impact on the integrity of the legislative process.

Restrict perks: My proposal would prohibit Members and staff from accepting first-class airfare. Meals and lodging in excess of the federal employee per-diem rate would also be prohibited unless previously authorized by the House Ethics Committee. Moreover, travel by spouses or family members would be limited.

Conclusion: I firmly believe that when congressional travel is done right, it can greatly benefit Members of Congress and the citizens they represent. The question is not whether to abolish congressional travel, but how to get rid of frivolous travel while maintaining the worthwhile. My hope is that by putting in place stronger safeguards against travel abuses, good, substantive congressional travel will enjoy the support of Members and the public.

CONGRESSIONAL SENIOR CITIZEN INTERN PROGRAM

HON. LOUIS STOKES

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 20, 1998

Mr. STOKES. Mr. Speaker, each year during the month of May our nation celebrates National Senior Citizen Month. All throughout May, various communities around the nation celebrate the diverse contributions of their senior citizens. In recognition and in conjunction with National Senior Citizen month, senior citizens from across the United States are gathering on Capitol Hill to participate in the annual Congressional Senior Citizen Intern Program.

The annual senior intern program provides our nation's senior citizens with a firsthand look at their government in action. While participating as interns in Washington, D.C., they attend meetings, issue forums, and workshops on topics which impact the elderly community in particular. The Senior Citizen Intern Program also allows its participants a chance to engage their congressional leaders, members